DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 011 CG 014 238

AUTHOR Arkin, Robert M.
TITLE Self-Concept and Self-Presentation.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (87th, New York, NY, September 1-5, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Anxiety; Behavioral Science Research; *Behavior Patterns; *Feedback; Individual Characteristics; Personality Development; Research Projects; *Responses; *Responsibility; *Self Concept

ABSTRACT

High social anxiety subjects switched from assuming greater personal responsibility for success than for failure to assuming greater responsibility for failure than for success when told that their attributions would be scrutinized by others. Low social anxiety individuals did just the opposite. Additional studies of response among high and low social anxiety subjects suggest that low social anxious subjects take every opportunity to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. They present themselves in a favorable light and accept positive evaluations from others. High social anxiety individuals do neither of these. This suggests a cycle of low self-esteem among high social anxiety persons. (Author/BMW)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED184011

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert M. Arkin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

# Self-Concept and Self-Presentation

APA, New York, 1979

R. M. Arkin

The term self presentation refers to the manner in which individuals adopt and carry out strategies for managing the impressions they make on others. Although the topic of self presentation has always enjoyed a place in comtemporary social psychology----thanks largely to the engaging theory of "presentation of self in everyday life" offered by Goffman in 1959----there appears to be a renewed interest in the approach to the analysis of interpersonal relations. Self presentation interpretations of such traditional social psychological topics as group decision making, attitude change, obesity and equity research have appeared recently.

Traditionally, the basic premise of the self presentation conceptual perspective is that individuals are highly concerned about winning the approval of others. To achieve this end, individuals are thought to be more or less discerning judges of how to behave in the most positive manner possible so as to create a favorable impression. However, Goffman was quite explicit in saying that the motives of the individual self presenting are many and varied:

To quote Goffman:

"He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them, or to obtain no clear-cut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid or, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of

CG 014238

others, especially their responsive treatment of him."

Research concerning these other goals of self presentation has been well-received and is commonly cited----for example, the tactics of persons wishing to portray being mentally ill----a strategy for absolving oneself of responsibility for a reprehensible act----or for maintaining one's perhaps-beneficial status. However, social psychologists have, until recently, focused nearly exclusively on the approval-gaining motive.

Despite this trend the attribution of responsibility literature, reflects a growing realization that individuals may use their attributional self presentations to achieve a variety of ends. For example, several studies have found that individuals moderate their attributional judgments ----toward neutrality----thus endorsing a non-controversial position---- whenever they must discuss their judgments with unattractive others. However, people endorse more extreme and controversial judgments when they must interact with attractive others. Presumably subjects wish to sustain an interaction with an attractive other, and therefore express their judgment confidently----perhaps to demonstrate their competence or sincerity. On the other hand, subjects may wish to terminate an interaction with an unattractive other, and then therefore express no position at all----leaving little to talk about.

Another interaction goal, aside from the winning of approval, is the avoidance of disapproval. Although these concepts may seem to be merely the converse of one another, it seems possible that people may differ with regard to which of these self presentation styles they may enact under certain conditions. Specifically, it seemed likely to us that individuals high in social anxiety would be particularly sensitive to public scrutiny of their behavior and to the potential embarrassment that such scrutiny

could bring about. Individuals high in social anxiety describe themselves as shy, easily embarrassed, and nervous in group situations. Thus, persons high in social anxiety might have a more intense reaction to social situations that are potentially embarrassing than would individuals low in social anxiety. Social anxiety----defined simply as fear of negative evaluation or disapproval----seemed a likely candidate for distinguishing among individuals in terms of self presentation style.

To test the idea that high social anxiety persons would be predisposed to avoid disapproval, we had individuals scoring high and low in social anxiety perform a task for which false-feedback about performance outcome has reliably produced what is called the "self-serving bias in causal attribution", that is, the tendency among individuals to assume more personal responsibility if they achieve a positive outcome than if they sustain a negative outcome. We expected high social anxiety individuals to be more modest than this about their personal responsibility----assuming more personal responsibility for failure and less for success----, but only when their behavior would be subjected to the scrutiny of others and embarrassment was a likely result of presenting an overly positive portrayal of self.

As can be seen from the results displayed in Table 1, high social anxiety subjects did indeed switch from assuming greater personal responsibility for success than for failure to assuming greater responsibility for failure than for success when they were told that their attributions would be scrutinized--in their own presence--by a group of prestigious others. In contrast, low social anxiety individuals responded to the social evalutation with a <u>more positive</u> portrayal of their responsibility, as you can see in the rightmost portion of the table.

These data suggest a kind of "cost-orientation" among high social anxiety individuals----modesty was the best policy when social evaluation was imminent. On the other hand, the data suggest a kind of "reward-orientation" among low social anxiety persons----they presented themselves in a favorable light only when social evaluation was imminent.

A second, more refined analysis of this interpretation was provided in a second experiment. In this second study the high evaluation conditions of experiment I were replicated. However, in addition, both high and low social anxiety subjects reported their attributions on the bogus pipeline ----an apparatus that the subject is led to believe is a lie-detector-like apparatus that can discern real from deceitful responses. The point of using the pipeline procedure is that, from the subject's point of view, it is presumbaly better to be perceived as having some undesirable characteristic or be viewed in some other undesirable light--than to be perceived as a liar. Naturally, the remaining half of the subjects responded via paper-and-pencil, not via the bogus pipeline.

As can be seen in Figure 1, both high and low social anxiety subjects alike reported attributions that were more favorable, more flattering---- they assumed more responsibility for success than for failure----when they responded via paper-and-pencil, rather than the bogus pipeline. The interaction of measurement technique and outcome was significant. But as is clear from the figure the flattering portrayal of events----and the switch to a less flattering portrayal of events----was most true of low social anxiety subjects----and among the low social anxiety subjects---- was most true of their rejection of responsibility for failure when responding via paper-and-pencil and their switch to assuming responsibility for failure when responding via bogus pipeline. This latter effect was

the only individual comparison among means that proved significant. This is the effect portrayed in the rightmost portion of Figure 1.

What all this seems to mean is that low social anxiety subjects' responses reflect a kind of riskiness, a kind of "reward orientation"----their attributions were far more flattering when they were off the lie detector-like apparatus than when they were on it. On the other hand, high social anxiety subjects did seem more "cost-oriented",----much less risky----their attributions were only slightly more personally flattering when they responded off than when they responded on the bogus pipeline. Seemingly, social evaluation alone was sufficient to keep high social anxiety subjects fairly modest--and fairly close to their most negative view of events.

So, social evaluation does seem to elicit from high and low social anxiety persons different self presentation styles----one conservative - one risky. This may not be a minor and esoteric point, especially if these attribution findings hold up in other domains. For there is every reason to believe that self presentation has a large impact on individuals' more enduring self concept. Gergen has shown that self presentation which is met with agreement from others results in a change in the presenter's self-concept that is lasting at least through the post-experimental interview. Similarly, Gross and his colleagues have shown that subjects experienced greater attitude change in their private beliefs toward a stance they had been asked to endorse if they learned that several others rated sincere than if the others had rated them insincere. In short, the processes of self-perception outlined by Bem (1972) can be expected to bring about changes in self-concept so long as others treat the individual's behavior as a valid reflection of his or her private beliefs. Because others are often inhibited about communicating direct evaluations, as Shrauger and Schoenemann noted in their recent paper

on self-concept in Psychological Bulletin, an individual's impression of another's reaction will often be that there is implicit acceptance of his or her self presentation. Therefore what a person claims to be has a good chance of being incorporated into his own view of him or herself. Of course, the implied lack of contact with the actual processes or causes of self presentational behavior is entirely consistent with Nisbett and Wilson's more general argument that people are not sensitive to such processes.

A further question we might ask concerns those cases in which the evaluations received from others that are known to be discrepant from one's own self-evaluation. Would high and low social anxiety individuals differ in their receptivity to such information? To answer this question we used the procedures of Sicoly and Ross----giving to subjects evaluations from high prestige, highly credible others that were substantially more or substantially less personally flattering evaluations than their own self-evaluations. (Incidentally, every subject in this study was informed that he or she had failed.) The attributional evaluations made by others, then, were more situational and less dispositional or were more dispositional and less situational than the subject's own rating.

As can be seen in Table 2, low social anxiety subjects rated the evaluator's attributions more accurate when they deviated in a direction complimentary to the subject. On the other hand, high social anxiety subjects reported believing anything they heard. Ratings of affect, which we shall turn to momentarily, suggest that the high accuracy ratings of high social anxiety subjects may have reflected little more than the "cost-orientation" I mentioned earlier----high social anxiety subjects seemed unwilling to disagree with the evaluator at all.

Concerning affect, high and low social anxiety individuals alike

reported feeling more joy after receiving the complimentary, flattering evaluation than the uncomplimentary evaluation----however, as can be seen in Figure 2, low social anxiety subjects experienced more negative affect after receiving the uncomplimentary evaluation----but high social anxiety subjects were more distressed and angry about receiving a complimentary evaluation. This strange state of affairs----a mixture of joy, distress and anger experienced by high social anxiety subjects who received complimentary feedback----suggests that these individuals were highly unsettled by this type of discrepant feedback. Low social anxiety subjects embraced complimentary feedback completely----on the other hand, high social anxiety individuals were unsettled by it and tended to reject it.

In sum, then, it appears that low social anxiety individuals take every opportunity to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. They present themselves in a favorable light and accept positive evaluations from others. High social anxiety individuals do neither of these. This suggests a vicious cycle of low self-esteem among high social anxiety persons---- their low self-esteem (which Brockner and others have found) is maintained by their unwillingness to present themselves positively--or even perhaps imagine themselves positively.

Table 1

Success-Failure Difference Scores
(of a Composite Index of Attribution to Self)

| | High Social Anxiety | Low Social Anxiety |
|---|---|---|
| Evaluation Forthcoming | -1.50 | .91 |
| No Evaluation | .99 | -.21 |

Note. Positive scores indicate greater self-attribution for success than for failure. Triple interaction, $p<.02$.

Mean Dispositional Attribution as a Function of Social Anxiety, Outcome and Measurement Technique

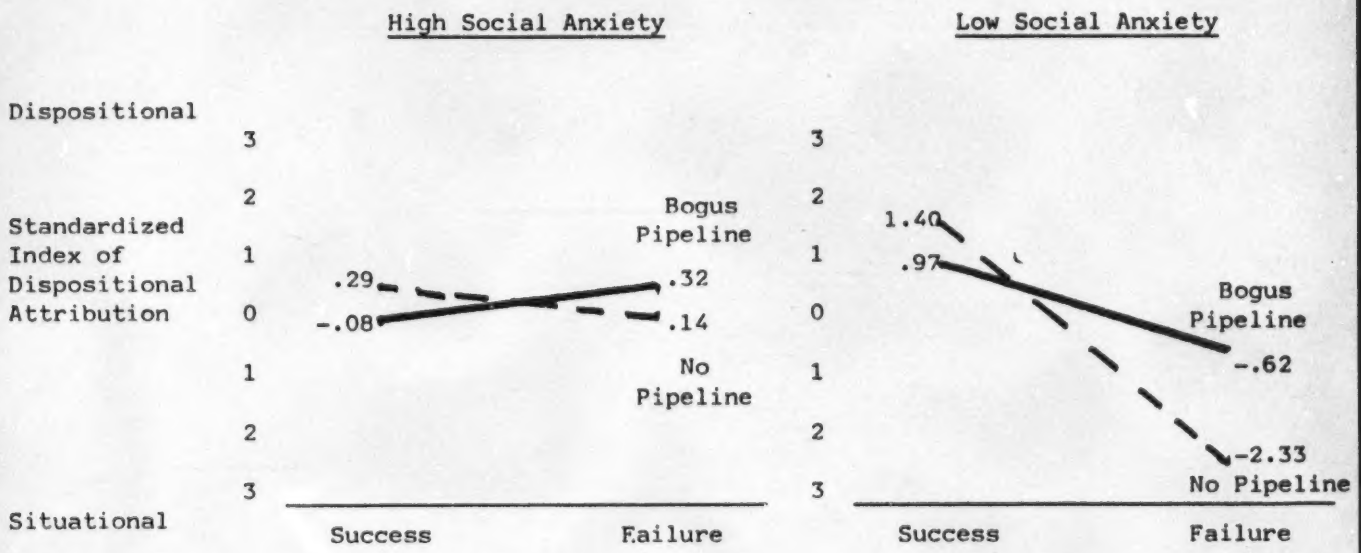


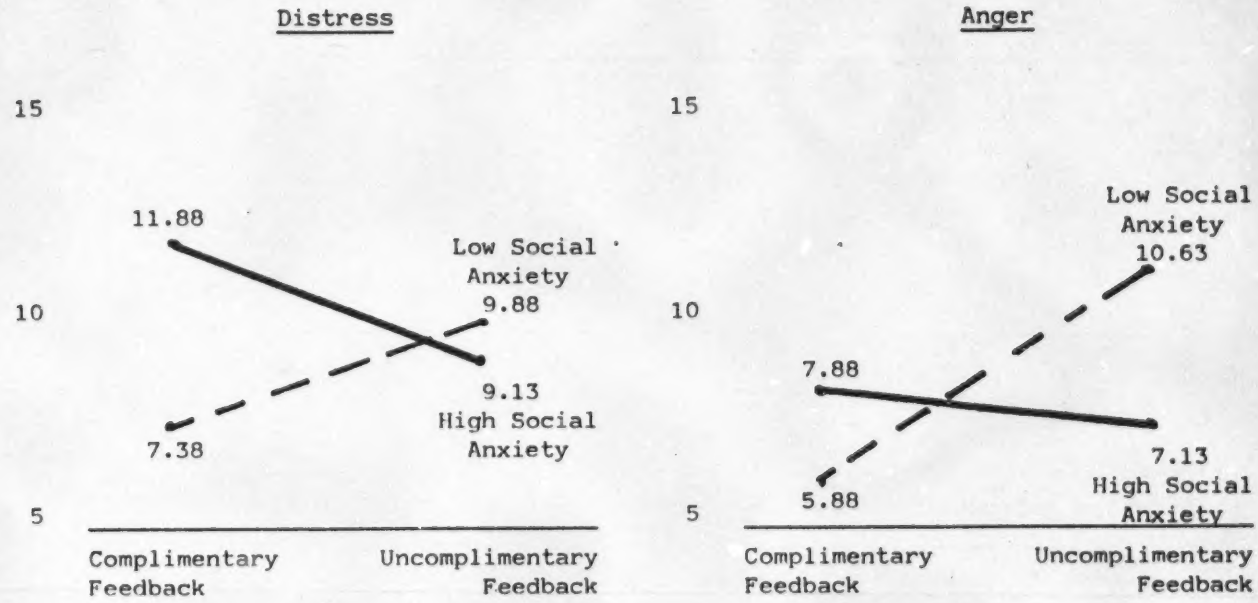
Table 2

Mean Accuracy Ratings of
Interpersonal Evaluations

| | High Social Anxiety | Low Social Anxiety |
|---|---|---|
| Positive, Complimentary Evaluation | 12.00 | 10.63 |
| Negative, Uncomplimentary Evaluation | 12.13 | 6.13 |

Note. The higher the score the greater the accuracy rating (15 pt. scale).
Interaction-F, $p < .02$
Both main effects, $p < .05$.

Mean Affect Ratings of High and Low
Social Anxiety Subjects




Note. Higher scores indicate greater affect reported (25 pt. scales). Interaction Fs, $p < .03$ (Anger), $p < .07$ (Distress).